

WOMEN'S COLLEGIATE RUGBY AS AN NCAA EMERGING SPORT

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Sherling: Women's Collegiate Rugby as an NCAA Emerging Sport
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This study gains perspective from current women's collegiate rugby team leaders on elevating club teams to the varsity level. USA Rugby supports the elevation initiative and has invested time and resources to the cause, yet conversion rates remain low. Using Qualtrics software, a survey was distributed to the population of women's rugby club student-leaders to gauge interest in and awareness of the NCAA sport elevation process. The data analyzed to assess interest, awareness, perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning as well as club teams' goals and values. While a majority of respondents expressed interest in becoming a varsity program, awareness of varsity application processes was lacking. The data also indicated that teams perceive NCAA status to bring tangible benefits, but place a very high value on team dynamics, upon which varsity status may have a more detrimental effect.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIAW	Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women
CWA	Committee on Women's Athletics
ESPN	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NSCRO	National Small College Ruby Organization
NWRA	National Women's Rowing Association
OCR	Office for Civil Right

Chapter 1: Introduction

I. Background

Although rugby is established globally as the sixth most popular sport, its history in the United States is relatively weak. The history of men's rugby is inexplicably intertwined with the formation of the NCAA and the development of American Football. Though some Northeast Ivy League schools held interest in rugby, the loose codification of the rules and a general lack of experience with the game left the sport prone to adaptation. This continual shift lead away from the Rugbeian rules and instead to the creation of "gridiron" in the late nineteenth century, but even that was still vastly different from the brand of football played today. Collegiate and recreational sports circa 1905 were highly dangerous, nearly riotous, and resulted in an alarming number of deaths that attracted the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt. After multiple meetings, committees and name changes, the NCAA emerged in 1910 as an agency to oversee sporting malpractice in football.

Women's rugby has risen in tandem with the Equality in Education Act of 1972, which is more commonly referred to as Title IX. Although the Act was not written expressly to promote women's athletics, its passage combined with the growth of the feminist movement has greatly advanced women's athletics in the past few decades. One specific result essential to this research is the creation of the NCAA's Emerging Sport classification.

The Emerging Sport category serves as a promotional trial ground for women's sports that are on the upswing of popularity. Schools are incentivized to give these sports varsity status because they can count towards the metrics used to assess Title IX

compliance and female students are given the opportunity to participate in a competitive environment. Sports admitted into the Emerging Sport category are given a ten year period to garner the requisite forty participating institutions which earns NCAA sanctioning. At the end of this period, the progress of the sport is evaluated to determine if the sport should be granted, dropped or offered an extension, which was the case for women's rugby in 2012. Women's rowing was the last sport to go through this process and is compared and contrasted to rugby in terms of development and possibility to aid institutions in Title IX compliance.

Women's rugby currently has a strong base of club teams across the country. Club teams are student run and financed through fundraising. One advantage of club sports is that it allows players and team leaders full latitude to develop a team culture that aligns with the values they wish to promote. This is especially important because of the complex nature of female rugby identity, where players may be negotiating their gender identity or sexual orientation. The literature highlights that the intense nature of the sport, as well as post-match rugby traditions promote close camaraderie among players.

Through these topics, factors were illuminated that could be attributed to the glacial conversion of women's rugby to NCAA status.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to identify the current status of women's rugby in the United States at the collegiate level. The sport is currently categorized as an NCAA Emerging Sport, but the rate of conversion of teams from the club level to the varsity level has been remarkably low. Although there are over 340 women's collegiate club teams, in its eleven years as a NCAA Emerging Sport, only seven of those teams have

shifted to varsity status. This research aims to discover the causes for this perceived resistance from the perspective of club leaders and illuminate the best route for the sport as a collective moving forward.

III. Research Questions

- a. Are women's club rugby teams interested in becoming an NCAA varsity sport?
- b. Are women's club teams aware of the application process to become a university-sponsored NCAA sport?
- c. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning?
- d. What goals and values do teams prioritize?

IV. Definition of Terms

- a. Rugby – designating or relating to a form of football played with an oval ball that may be kicked, carried, and passed from hand to hand. In the game, points are scored by grounding the ball behind the opponents' goal line (thereby scoring a try) or by kicking it between the two posts and over the crossbar of their goal (Rugby [Def. 1], n.d.).
- b. NCAA – (National Collegiate Athletic Association) organization in the United States that administers intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA functions as a general legislative and administrative authority for intercollegiate athletics. It formulates and enforces the rules of play for various sports and eligibility criteria for athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 2007).
- c. Emerging Sport - An emerging sport is a sport recognized by the NCAA that is intended to provide additional athletics opportunities to female student-athletes. Institutions are allowed to use emerging sports to help meet the NCAA minimum

sports sponsorship requirements and also to meet the NCAA's minimum financial aid awards (Criteria for Emerging Sports, 2011).

- d. Sport – for purposes of reviewing emerging sports for women proposals, a sport shall be defined as an institutional activity involving physical exertion with the purpose of competition versus other teams or individuals within a collegiate competition structure. Furthermore, sport includes regularly scheduled team and/or individual, head-to-head competition (at least five) within a competitive season(s); and standardized rules with rating/scoring systems ratified by official regulatory agencies and governing bodies (Criteria for Emerging Sports, 2011).
- e. Title IX – “No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, be treated differently from another person or otherwise be discriminated against in any interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics offered by a recipient, and no recipient shall provide any such athletics separately on such basis...” (20 USC § 1681).
- f. Sport Club – Sport Clubs are University recognized student organizations that are student-run and student-funded. Typically, these are year-round clubs that compete in intercollegiate competitions on a local, regional, and national scale (Getting Involved, n.d.)

V. Assumptions/Limitations/Delimitations

- a. Assumptions
 - i. It is assumed that all subjects will answer the survey questions honestly and completely.
 - ii. The completion of the study is voluntary for all subjects.

b. Limitations

- i. The study is limited to women's rugby collegiate players with public email addresses who hold a leadership role within their club during the 2013-2014 academic year.
- ii. There is a possibility that there will be a non-response bias due to the voluntary nature of the survey.

c. Delimitations

- i. Perceptions of club rugby leaders may not reflect the opinions of all current women's rugby players.

VI. Significance

In determining the current status of women's rugby in the United States, this research aims to illuminate the attitude, whether positive or negative, of current clubs towards attaining NCAA status. Regardless of the clubs' positions, understanding the mindsets of the players is important because within the club model they have been and are currently responsible for establishing team cultures that will determine the future of the sport. If there is interest, but very little knowledge of the process or benefits, the NCAA and USA Rugby can take that information going forward with club outreach or marketing plans to ensure that their message is effectively tailored. Conversely, if there is little interest, USA Rugby and the NCAA should consider a full strategy re-evaluation to establish a framework for growth that is compatible with the club's interests.

While this research superficially addresses the fiscal and Title IX compliance aspects of women's rugby at surveyed institutions through the three-part test, the growth of women's rugby would align very well with the spirit in which Title IX was conceived.

As a full contact sport, rugby offers unique participation opportunities for women that have been reshaping the image of the female athlete since the 1970s. While Title IX focused primarily on participation in the broadest sense, rugby takes this to another level because of the physicality and “masculinity” inherent in the sport. In rugby women are dissolving dichotomous gender roles and feeling empowered to express aggression and athletic prowess, qualities which are put at a premium in men’s sport performance. The empowerment of expression extends beyond rugby as an outlet for behaviors that are not seen as conventionally female; the key to empowerment lies in women perceiving that these behaviors are acceptable and not devious or incorrect in any way. The future of women’s athletics will be shaped by the way that females can negotiate their identity as both a woman and an athlete. NCAA endorsement of women’s rugby has the potential to push American sports to the cusp of what the Title IX legislation truly intended, by endorsing the image of a female athlete unrestrained by conventional femininity.

This research is the first to tie rugby administration and elevation of the sport to the ethnographic factors of current players. While much of the reviewed literature discussed gender identity and expression, it was assessed cross-sectionally, and not within a forward-facing orientation. In regards to literature on varsity progress, coaches were the primary interviewees. While in high school and collegiate varsity sports coaches have a strong influence on the culture and performance of their team, this is not always true in the club model where rugby has developed to this point. The survey methods of this research are adapted to reach out to players who are the engine of the club model and thus are the party primarily responsible for steering the advancement of the sport. Adapting the research to the power structure of rugby’s current state was found to be

unprecedented in literature review. This change is aimed to elucidate factors that may not be considered in a top-down approach by administration.

Assessing the current status of women's rugby will illuminate factors that contribute to its sluggish expansion as a varsity sport and allow the approximation of cause. Refocusing development efforts based on these results could lead to an effective framework for growth. If the NCAA path is the best option for the sport, institutions can show a true espousal of Title IX's values through the endorsement of a sport that allows women to embrace identities as athletes that transcend traditional gender roles and redefine women's athletics in America.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter will reveal the path that rugby has taken from its unruly masculine beginnings through the present, where it is seeking NCAA recognition as a unique athletic opportunity for young women. The interaction between Title IX compliance requirements and elevating women's club rugby to varsity status is explored and information about women's rowing and its elevation to varsity status is also provided. Finally, other academic studies are discussed.

I. History of Rugby

Like many other sports, rugby has multiple claims of origin, although the most popular version features William Webb Ellis, a pupil at Rugby School in England with a “fine disregard for the rules of football (soccer)” (Richards, 2006, p. 24). Circa 1823, Ellis is reported to have scooped up the soccer ball and ran with it, giving way to a new form of play. Rugby took its name from Ellis' alma mater. As the author succinctly puts it, “nobody invents activities as elemental as kicking and running with a ball” and there are mentions of similar sporting games played in ancient Rome, Ireland, Wales, France and Georgia (Richards, 2006, p. 26). Despite wide rule variations among clubs, the Rugby School codification of the game “emerged to become the national code” after creating the first written set of rules in 1845, due to a strong base of advocates and widespread influence in the University community (Richards, 2006, p. 30).

The global spread of rugby is largely attributed to British imperialism and the sport made its way to America in this manner as well. In 1875, Harvard played Montreal under the Rugbeian rules and eventually convinced Princeton and Yale to form the Intercollegiate Football Association. The evolution of ‘American Football’ began almost

immediately afterward, attributed largely to a “lack of tradition” and ongoing confusion with the Rugbeian rules of play, as well as strong influences from Walter Camp who became known as the “father of college football” (Richards, 2006, p. 52).

Despite the growing popularity of “gridiron” (football) over rugby, the US pulled together teams to compete in the 1920 Belgian and 1924 French Games, two of the mere four instances in which rugby was contested in the Olympics. The Olympic effort was instigated primarily by California, the state with the “strongest legacy for rugby” (Ratcliff, 2007, p. 108). The Americans focused on tackling and endurance to overcome their lack of skill in comparison to the European teams, drawing inspiration from the New Zealand All Blacks’ “power game” (Ratcliff, 2007, p. 108). Despite their underdog status, the physical power and fitness of the American teams earned them two gold medals, both following victories over France. In the words of 1924 American player, Richard Hyland: “The superior knowledge of the game and its tricks enjoyed by the French could not lick that tackling. Every time a Frenchman touched the ball he was belted blue. Condition then took over and the last half of the game was a breeze” (Ratcliff, 2007, p. 110). Despite back-to-back gold medals, the conclusion of the Games “marked the end of rugby’s heyday in the USA” (Ratcliff, 2007, p. 110).

While rugby didn’t die out completely in America, it “continued to sit outside the official structures in the universities” giving it an “anti-authoritarian appeal” (Richards, 2006, p. 143). Clubs formed in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Southern California, the Midwest and the East between 1929 and 1933. Women began to pick up the game in the 1970s, which can be attributed to the feminist movement and the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Bolin, 2003). Women’s teams developed in clubs and in universities through the

1970s and 1980s and the first National team was founded in 1987, which adopted the name of the Eagles in 1990. The next year, the Eagles took first place at the first ever women's World Cup championship in Cardiff, Wales (Miller, 2002, pp. 225-227). In a more recent revolution in collegiate rugby, the women's game has broken onto the NCAA varsity scene in 2002 as an Emerging Sport. Today there are over 300 women's club teams across the country among Divisions I, II and III and seven NCAA sponsored varsity programs, with two additional teams slated to be added in Fall 2014 (About the NCAA: Emerging Sports for Women, 2012; Staff, 2013; USA College Rugby , 2013).

II. The National Collegiate Athletic Association and Title IX

The NCAA's history runs in parallel to the history of rugby development in the United States; the primary motivation for its formation came from the dauntingly high number of deaths in the early versions of American football, due to a lack of formal rules as well as the use of paid "ringers" (Crowley, 2006, pp. 3-4). The menace of early football became so severe that President Theodore Roosevelt himself called for the meeting that would lead to the creation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1905. The IAAUS had an initial membership of thirty nine institutions in 1906 and by 1919 had changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association and was governing eleven different sports. The next major landmark for the NCAA was the sponsorship of championships, with the first being for Track & Field in 1921.

From its 1905 inception, the NCAA was designed to oversee men's sports and was only prompted to pick up women's sports holistically after the passage of Title IX. Prior to 1972 the primary governing body for women was the Association for

Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (IAIW). The IAIW operated under a vastly different mission than the NCAA, “while men’s sport celebrated an elite athlete, professionalism and a ‘win-oriented philosophy,’ women’s sport emphasized universal participation, amateurism, and an ‘athlete-oriented’ philosophy” (Greenberg, 2002, p. 17). With the growth of NCAA championship offerings, institutions shifted away from the IAIW, which resulted in its dissolution by 1982.

For women’s sports, Title IX was both a blessing and a curse. ‘Title IX’ refers to the specific subsection of the Education Amendments of 1972 that pertains to athletics in federally funded institutions. The legislation states:

“No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, be treated differently from another person or otherwise be discriminated against in any interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics offered by a recipient, and no recipient shall provide any such athletics separately on such basis” (20 USC § 1681).

As mentioned above, Title IX instigated the move of women’s sports from the IAIW to the NCAA. While the NCAA had a longer history of sports management, the differences in sporting culture between the genders were significant. The men’s programs had their roots in violent beginnings and win-at-all-costs attitudes. The IAIW was grown from physical education departments and had a high focus on participation and developing fundamental athleticism (Greenberg, 2002). While the NCAA offered participation opportunities for female athletes, there was a marked change in leadership dynamics. When there were mergers of male and female athletic programs, only one athletic director was selected to run the program. In most cases, the chosen athletic

director was male, reinforcing male ideologies of sport and depriving female athletes of role models (Greenberg, 2002, pp. 214, 284).

Since its passage, Title IX has been subject to heavy scrutiny and has required frequent clarification. In order to be compliant with Title IX, institutions must meet the specific parameters for gender equity in athletics as they are outlined in the Regulations, promulgated in 1975. Institutions must comply with all regulations, but most attention has focused on scholarships, equal participation opportunity, and equal treatment for participants. Compliance with equal opportunity proved confusing for many institutions, prompting the OCR to issue a Policy Interpretation in 1979. The most general guidelines pertinent to an institution's addition of new sports are commonly referred to as the "three prongs" or three-part test, which outlines three different routes for institutions to seek compliance. The prongs consist of proportionality (the male-to-female ratio of athletes is equal to that of the entire student body), continuing program expansion for the underrepresented sex (typically females), or the effective accommodation of the abilities and interests of its students, particularly the underrepresented sex (Office for Civil Rights, 1979).

Although Title IX was enacted in 1972, many institutions still do not provide equal opportunity. One potential roadblock that exists in Title IX compliance is in institutional willingness to make aggressive program changes. In part this could be affected by a lack of females in high ranking administrative roles. Sources of discrimination include "social and sport ideologies, institutional structures, stereotyping, the continued dominance of men, and the downgrading of women to support positions" (Schneider, 2010, p. 17).

In a *News & Observer* article from 1997, it is clear that Title IX compliance was still a sticking point for many programs. The publication of the article followed the verdict of *Cohen vs. Brown University (1996)*, which upheld a strict interpretation of the statute and affirmed the claim that Brown was discriminating against its female athletes when it moved two women's teams from university-funded status to donor-funded status (Politi, 1997). In the article, there are clear proponents of aggressively pursuing compliance and others who see adding new teams as an unnecessary burden to existing teams (Politi, 1997). While the article may no longer reflect current status, it mentions UNC adding women's rowing as a varsity sport, which was the most recent addition. The addition of any new sport for women is relevant to Title IX because it establishes a 'history of progress' in relation to the three-prong framework.

According to the Office of Post Secondary Education report, in the 2011-2012 academic year, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill had an enrollment of 17,386 undergraduates with 7,212 males (41.5%) and 10,174 females (58.5%). Within athletics the unduplicated count (played on at least one team) of athletes was 412 males (54.8%) and 340 females (45.2%). Athletically related student aid falls along the same percentages, with 54% going to men's teams and 46% going towards women's teams. (Office of Post Secondary Education, 2011-2012) Sources from the NCAA and USA Rugby estimate a typical women's rugby team to have a roster of approximately 32 players (Projected Budget, n.d.; Rugby, 2013). For the UNC-CH, this would have made their athletic representation shift to 412 males (52.5%) and 372 females (47.4%), marginally progressing towards proportionality and clearly continuing to expand opportunities for women.

In terms of costs, USA Rugby estimates a women's varsity rugby team to require a total operating budget of \$142,895 that encompasses coaching salaries, administrative costs, events, travel, equipment, uniforms, and recruiting. The sources differ on start-up costs, with the NCAA estimating \$15,000 and the USA Rugby budget claiming \$15,550, but not allocating for a scrum sled, which at a minimum prices at a few thousand dollars (Projected Budget, n.d.; Rugby, 2013; Team Sales, 2013). Neither of the estimates includes the purchase of rugby goal posts, which are structured and positioned differently on the pitch than football uprights and may be another potential expense. The annual budget proposed by USA Rugby (less the one-time expenses) is \$127,345 and is approximately equal to the operating expenses (game day) for women's volleyball (Office of Post Secondary Education, 2011-2012).

While the varsity application process varies across institutions, the procedures provided for Indiana University and Alfred University are specifically designed for existing club sports or organizations to utilize. When submitting a request at Indiana University the submitter should provide "the number of participants, current schedule, records from previous years, equipment and facility needs of the sport and any other pertinent information" (Title IX Gender Equity , 2013). Alfred University requires further explication of needs for time commitments, seasonality, budgetary needs and personnel. Additionally, AU seeks information that illustrates the elevated team's competitive fit by asking the requester to provide information regarding "available competition at the Division III level, reflecting conference, local and regional teams" (Intercollegiate Varsity Sport Request Policy , 2012). These procedures correspond to the third Title IX

prong of meeting the students' interests by only accepting requests from clubs already in existence and by assessing their abilities through the past performance records.

III. Emerging Sports

Although the number of women's varsity sports teams per institution has nearly quadrupled from 2.5 in 1970 to 8.73 in 2012, there is still a significant lack of participation opportunities for women (Report marks growth in women's varsity athletics, 2012). To address these inequities and encourage member institutions to add more women's teams, the NCAA established the Emerging Sports designation in 1993 (About the NCAA: Emerging Sports for Women, 2012). The program operates under the Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA), which was created when women's sports were incorporated into the NCAA structure in 1981 (Crowley, 2006, p. 143).

The NCAA defines an Emerging Sport as "a sport recognized by the NCAA that is intended to provide additional athletics opportunities to female student-athletes," but does not have enough participating institutions to garner a NCAA sanctioned championship (About the NCAA: Emerging Sports for Women, 2012, p. inset). These sports are granted a ten year window in which to form the minimum of forty collegiate varsity programs. A key incentive in the program is that during these building years Emerging Sports can count towards institutional Title IX and NCAA equal opportunity requirements.

Rugby has been designated as an Emerging Sport since 2002, which indicates that it is now in its eleventh year of varsity limbo (About the NCAA: Emerging Sports for Women, 2012). Although women's rugby only has seven of the 40 teams needed to be considered an NCAA championship sponsored sport, it received an extension to retain

Emerging Sport status. Without further progress to justify further extensions, there is a possibility that rugby may be dropped from the NCAA altogether.

As counter-examples to the apparent stagnation, both Life University and Central Washington University plan to add a women's varsity program beginning in Fall 2014. While Life is the reigning champion of the men's club Division I title and also maintains a post-graduate team that feeds into the men's US National team, they have never sponsored a women's rugby program at any level. It will be interesting to see its development utilizing the perks of recruitment and the mandated equality of resources as opposed to an institution that elevates a club team to varsity status (Staff, 2013).

In many cases of failed change, a key factor is the lack of top-down support. However, this does not seem to be the case with USA Rugby; their website openly provides resources that encourage schools to apply for varsity status, including step-by-step guidelines, sample budgets and cover letters, and materials outlining in-game and training aspects (USA College Rugby, 2013). Considering some of the data above, especially the comparisons that will be drawn between rowing and rugby in the next section and the active efforts of USA Rugby to promulgate varsity uptake, it is difficult to see what is hindering institutions from making a large-scale, collective conversion.

In terms of bottom-up development, USA Rugby also actively promotes programs that aim to organically grow the game at the pre-collegiate levels, particularly through youth and women. Try On Rugby takes a holistic approach by providing not only equipment, but also comprehensive educational materials (Try On Rugby, n.d.). Rookie Rugby is a program that uses touch and flag levels of contact to introduce the rules of the game and gain youth involvement at a very young age to encourage participation later in

life. In one quote from a promotional video for Rookie Rugby, USA Rugby CEO Nigel Melville states:

“When they have a go, they love it. So we’ve just got to get it in front of them. I want them to find rugby earlier and make a choice earlier so that when they go to high school, they go ‘I’m going to the high school that plays rugby. I’m going to the college that plays rugby. I’m going there as a rugby player, I’m not going there as a footballer’ (Rookie Rugby, n.d.).”

Although it was short-lived, traditional fifteen-a-side rugby has previously had a stint as an Olympic sport. In the early twentieth century, the men’s American side came away with two gold medals in Olympic rugby, but its removal from the Games shortly thereafter was attributed to be the primary cause of the decline in U.S. male participation (Shockley, *Southern Women in the Scrums: The Emergence and Decline of Women's Rugby in the American Southeast, 1974-1980s*, 2006). As of October 9, 2009, rugby was voted back into the Olympics by the International Olympic Committee by a margin of 81-8 (121st IOC Session and XIII Olympic Congress; Agenda for Media, 2009) (Harig, 2009) . Unlike in the 1924 games, a variation of rugby known as rugby-7s will be played by twelve men’s and women’s teams from around the globe. In rugby-7s, each team only has seven players on the pitch at one time instead of fifteen, scrums consist of three players per side instead of eight, and halves are only seven minutes long with one minute between for halftime (Rugby-7 Equipment and History, 2013). While the NCAA has only classified rugby-15s as an Emerging Sport, Olympic status still provides additional athletic opportunities for American female rugby players and promotes publicity for the sport as a whole.

IV. Comparing Rowing and Rugby

Around the same time in 1875 that American men were playing rugby test matches against McGill College from Montreal, women at Wellesley College in Massachusetts were forming rowing clubs. Recreational and collegiate clubs grew across the country throughout the first half of the twentieth century and the first governing body, the National Women's Rowing Association (NWRA) was founded in 1962. 1966 marked both the first NWRA national championships and the first intercollegiate race. Female American rowers have also had an international presence, appearing in their first European Championship in 1967 and in the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics where women's rowing was included for the first time. For collegiate rowing, the NWRA sponsored the first national championship in 1980, with the title going to U.C. Berkeley (Miller, 2002).

Due to the strong membership of the NWRA and the 1982 creation of US Rowing, the sport operated out of the jurisdiction of the NCAA until 1994 when it was declared an Emerging Sport. However, rowing didn't remain in the Emerging Sport category for long and the first NCAA sponsored championship was held in 1997 (About the NCAA: Emerging Sports for Women, 2012). While rowing has many different events that vary based on boat type and number of rowers per boat, the NCAA sanctioned event is only for "heavyweight" boats of eight rowers.

As the most recently added varsity sport for women, rowing provides insight into the NCAA incorporation process and has a key similarity to rugby in that it has low youth involvement. One source states that as many as 90% of all intercollegiate rowers had no rowing experience prior to entering college (Rosner, 2001). This point is very important

when considering the later claim that “achieving substantial accommodation is cited by the schools that have added women's rowing as the single most influential reason for the sport's growth” (Rosner, 2001, p. 299). Rugby is able capitalize on this argument as well—that opportunity results in interest and not vice-versa—to catalyze institutions towards requesting varsity recognition. In addition to the recruiting difficulties that low numbers of youth programs cause, rowing also is subject to a certain homogeneity of its athletes. Rowing has “traditionally been limited both in its geographic scope and in racial and economic diversity,” (Rosner, 2001, p. 303) a point that was also referenced in Shockley’s “Southern Women in the Scrums” in regards to rugby. While the reasoning for the lack of diversity for each sport varies, it is still a similarity that must be addressed in recruiting opportunities.

Compared to other sports offered for women, rowing is a very expensive option, with higher start-up and per annum costs. However, from a Title IX perspective, a women’s rowing team is a very compelling investment because of its large roster size—some run as high as 100 participants—and results in low spending per athlete or per capita. In relation to the second benchmark of compliance (history of program expansion), “[t]he tremendous growth of the sport at the intercollegiate level allows those schools that have recently begun to sponsor it to claim a history of program expansion” (Rosner, 2001, p. 310).

Another consequence of having a weak-to-nonexistent high school recruiting base is a disparity between the available scholarships and the “high school athletes talented enough to earn them” (Rosner, 2001, p. 326). Critics from mainstream sports argue against the principle of offering scholarships to inexperienced athletes, however, offering

financial incentives can help to grow the sport and to develop novice athletes into competitors worthy of a scholarship. Because rowing is not popular at the high school level, many of the athletes participated in other sports prior to college. Coaches of the more mainstream sports feel that rowing's recruitment infringes upon their ability to retain athletes when there is another Division I scholarship opportunity on the table (Rosner, 2001) (Politi, 1997).

In an editorial from the NCAA, some of the points referenced in Rosner (2001) are more succinctly stated:

“There is no doubt this growth occurred largely because of the impetus of gender equity. What no one expected, though, was the rapid growth of a sport that did not have the high-school participation base or a familiarity with the sport among university decision-makers. In fact, the growth at the collegiate level for women's rowing also has resulted in a concomitant growth among high schools participating in women's rowing. Administrators found when they looked into the sport that many institutions were willing to share their success stories, and those shared stories further increased interest in the sport” (Jurgens, 2005).

Discussion has also focused on what is being done by USA Rugby to spur teams in the direction of adding varsity programs. Rebecca Carlson, a former varsity player for Eastern Illinois, was hired by USA Rugby to act essentially as an ambassador of the sport, attending conferences and speaking with administrators about the benefits of rugby and dispelling the stigma around the sport. After hiring Carlson, three schools added varsity programs, bringing the total to four across all three divisions (Hosick, 2007). While there appears to be a causal relationship between Carlson's outreach and the

addition of the new programs, the stagnating progress from 2007 to the present day draws skepticism (USA College Rugby, 2013).

V. Club Sports

Currently, nearly all women's rugby teams operate as club sports at their respective institutions. Within the club structure, there is still some variation, with teams belonging to Division I, Division II or the National Small College Rugby Organization (NSCRO). The most notable non-varsity program in women's rugby is Penn State, who has appeared in the Division I Final Four every year since 1995. Penn State classifies both its men's and women's rugby teams as "team sports," which fall between club sports and varsity sports (Welcome to Penn State Women's Rugby!, 2013). Some specific parameters that delineate their team sport status are the availability of a Team Sport Manager, an Administrative Assistant, ability to actively recruit, access to athletic trainers at all practices and games, charter bus usage, and requests for daily food reimbursement of up to \$28.00 per player per day (Penn State University Team Sports Handbook, 2013).

Aspects of the Penn State program that are more common to most other sport club programs include student leadership and decision makers, the possibility of raising money to cover team expenses and having students determine and manage scheduling and travel. Club sports are summed up in a New York Times article from 2008:

"It's college athletics without the pageantry or prerogative, and that's the way athletes in club sports like it. They devise the practices, make the team rules, decide whom to play and when, raise the money for uniforms and game officials,

schedule the hotel and travel arrangements and manage the paperwork”

(Pennington, 2008, p. ¶ 3).

The article also touches on the other side of the divide, citing frustration with the clear gap between varsity “lavishness” and club sports’ penny-pinching resourcefulness.

In 2007, the first women’s NCAA rugby championship was played between West Chester University and Eastern Illinois University. The ESPN article published about the event extended far beyond the box score with interviews of high school seniors, athletic directors and others in rugby administration. While the main focus is on the seniors who really want rugby to join the NCAA championship ranks, it also raises concerns of whether being an NCAA varsity sport would detract from rugby culture. In the club system, opposing teams will often get together after matches to eat and sometimes drink in the spirit of sportsmanship and camaraderie. In the survey distributed by Shockley “one of the most-repeated responses on the survey was the enjoyment a woman rugger feels after she plays hard and meets the other team at the always-obligatory post [match] social” (Shockley, 2005, p. 156).

A unique aspect of rugby is that there is no variation in the rules for men and women. Post-game socials operate in a similar framework, with lewd songs, drinking games and general debauchery equally present for both genders. For women’s teams this furthers the sense of community and camaraderie and also serves as another form of expression that defies typical gender norms and “ladylike” behavior (Shockley, 2005). However, with the increasing number of competitive clubs and growth at the youth and high school level, socials are evolving and attempting to dismantle the stereotype of the beer-guzzling rugger. West Chester University (NCAA since 2004) coach Tony

DeRemer endorses the shift towards team dinner socials or cookouts like those hosted by Penn State and Navy (Finlan, 2007). One high school senior present at the Eastern Illinois versus West Chester match opposed NCAA sanctioning of rugby: “If we give that [socials] up, we'd be like every other sport. To be honest, I would not want it to go NCAA. Rugby has its own circle of tournaments to go to. The NCAA to me is just a title” (Gisondi, 2007).

Although the social aspect is seen by some to define rugby, it is very difficult to ignore the benefits that come with the support of an athletic department. West Chester coach, Tony DeRemer saw certain changes in recruiting and scheduling as a sacrifice he is willing to make:

“..to gain access to medical support, charter buses for games, and all expenses paid. No longer do players have to tape one another's ankles on the field, cram nine people in a hotel room, jam seven into a car for a six-hour road trip, and spend \$600 to \$1,000 for expenses related to travel, fees and uniforms” (Gisondi, 2007, p. ¶ 14).

ESPN article also neglects to mention Penn State, Army, Stanford and Princeton, teams that have had perennial success despite not having claimed varsity status. These teams make regular (or constant, as Penn State) appearances in the USA Rugby sanctioned Final Four and play at consistently higher levels than most teams that are now NCAA affiliated. If teams are unable to correlate varsity status with a better record on the field, this may encourage teams to stick to the club model status quo.

VI. Female Identity in Sport

Literature specific to the American South indicate that the sport faced many barriers and forming programs was exceptionally difficult, due to the strongly engrained ‘Southern Belle’ stereotype. The article goes on to claim that “women’s rugby stood as a signifier of the new feminist movement” (Shockley, *Southern Women in the Scrums: The Emergence and Decline of Women's Rugby in the American Southeast, 1974-1980s*, 2006, p. 133). The interactions between men’s teams and women’s teams took on a complex dynamic due to the “hypermasculinity” of the game, but also the fact that women’s teams looked to the men’s leagues for guidance in creating league infrastructures.

A large percentage of non-injury related peer reviewed articles for women’s rugby focused primarily on gender and sexuality stereotypes and identities. The first article reviewed “Why American Women Play Rugby,” covers a broad range of prior literature and finds many reasons and motivations. One study cites playing rugby as “resistance to the female apologetic,” where players rejected claims that participating would in any way put their femininity or attractiveness at risk. The second study says that women were “drawn to the physicality of the game” and that they “rejected notions of the ideal feminine body.” Others mention the social aspect of rugby, acceptance of “non-traditional” body size and strength, and finally some address the ambivalence toward the lesbian-centered stigma of the sport. In the primary research of the study, the open-ended responses from the issued survey could be classified into the following four categories: 1) appreciation of the game; 2) aggressiveness of the game; 3) social aspects of the game; and 4) benefits derived from the game (Fields & Comstock, 2008). Looking at examples

of the open-ended responses, removing the social support aspect from an NCAA sanctioned college game could be removing a traditional part of the sport that draws in many avid players.

The second article, “Debutantes, Brats and Mayhem” (all names of women’s club teams in the South), reflected many of the same values. One interesting aspect of the survey asked the participants about interaction with ‘non-ruggers’ and the way that stereotyping was revealed and dealt with. The most common response was to “educate,” and dispel many of the stereotypes that exist as opposed to taking a defensive or offended stance.

Although rugby was only tangentially mentioned, “Media Coverage of the Female Athlete Before, During and After Title IX: *Sports Illustrated* Revisited” highlighted the broader placement of female athletes within American society (Kane, 1988). When reviewing SI, Kane considered the number of feature articles published, whether the subject was athlete or non-athlete and whether the athlete participated in a ‘sex-appropriate’ (i.e. tennis, golf) or ‘sex-inappropriate’ sport (i.e. basketball, rugby). While the number of articles changed very little over time, Kane found the largest (and growing) discrepancy between the articles published about sex-appropriate versus sex-inappropriate sports, with favor falling heavily to the sex-appropriate side. In closing, Kane juxtaposes the supposed societal ideology that “sport involvement is an invaluable learning tool,” with her conclusion that “fifteen years after Title IX, female participation in athletics remains heavily influenced by traditional beliefs about what is considered appropriate, ladylike behavior,” intoning that females are not granted the full benefit of sport (Kane, 1988).

VII. Summary

In reviewing the literature and other rugby sites, there seems to be a disjunction between women's rugby as a collectively growing sport and the support of individual institutions. Having been an Emerging Sport for so long, what is preventing the hundreds of women's club teams from reaching for NCAA status?

The literature still leaves unanswered questions: How much weight does the social aspect of rugby hold in a team's decision to become NCAA regulated? In both articles regarding the reasons women are drawn to rugby, the interviewees cited reasons such as "sisterhood" and "support," but these reasons were not tied to the administration of the sport. Furthermore, what impact do perceptions of femininity, sexuality and gender roles have on the growth of rugby as a "hypermasculine" sport?

This research will illuminate which barriers are most obstructive to the development of NCAA women's rugby and to find possible solutions, possibly including the retention of rugby as an exclusively-club run sport.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors are contributing to the slow conversion rate of women's club rugby teams to varsity status in an effort to assess players' interest in and awareness of NCAA women's rugby, measure players' perceptions of benefits and drawbacks of the NCAA framework, and gauge the extent to which teams identify themselves as a more competitive club or a social club. Additionally, the research will explore some of players' personal experiences and feelings in relation to their club and the sport of rugby.

II. Instrumentation & Data Collection

The instrument utilized in this study was founded upon a rigorous review of literature. Relevant questions were compiled, and a panel of experts including two University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill sport administration professors, a current women's club rugby coach, a Qualtrics survey methodologist, and the Director of Sport Clubs at the University of Chapel Hill were consulted in the creation of this survey. In order to enhance survey validity, a pilot study was conducted by having nine members of a women's rugby executive board verify that the questions were clear and the survey questions were able to capture the responses needed to answer the research questions.

The data for this study was collected through an e-mail survey sent to women's club rugby team executive members and team captains at 389 collegiate institutions. E-mail addresses were collected from an administrator with USA Rugby, the USA Rugby website, university campus recreation websites and individual club websites. Participants were e-mailed an online survey through Qualtrics. The survey sent to the women's club rugby players included four main

sections addressing the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The survey utilized a variety of question types including multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, open-ended and Likert-scale questions. One Likert-scale question had responses with “1” representing “Very Detrimental” and “5” representing “Very Beneficial.” The second Likert-scale question had responses ranging from “Not Important” to “Very Important.” Each Likert-Style question also included a “Not Applicable or Unsure” answer choice that prevented the question from skewing the results.

Because of outdated contact information and team websites, survey respondents were asked to self-identify their institution, USA Rugby division and NCAA division assignments, and their role within the women’s rugby program at their respective institution. The USA Rugby websites listed some teams that are no longer in play and omits some that have formed more recently. There was also conflicting information regarding into which divisions the teams were categorized. Respondents were given a choice of ‘Unsure’ in response to both their USA Rugby designation and their NCAA designation to avoid skewing the results.

The first survey question corresponds directly to the first research question, asking respondents if they would be interested in having women’s rugby as a varsity sport at their institution. This question is in a multiple choice format with “Yes,” “No” and “Unsure.” Respondents were then asked to explain their answer choices. Their responses were coded to find patterns within the responses.

The second survey question corresponds in the same way to the second research question, asking respondents if they were aware prior to taking the survey that women’s rugby is currently classified as an NCAA Emerging Sport. The survey item provides the definition of an Emerging Sport and informs the respondent that there are seven women’s rugby teams that hold NCAA

status before prompting a response. This question is also a multiple choice response, with “Yes” and “No” as possible answer choices.

To address the third research question, a series of categories are applied to Likert-style questions regarding perceived benefits of NCAA and club status. The questions ask respondents both how they feel NCAA status would be beneficial and how it would be detrimental. Response options are: “Very Detrimental,” “Detrimental,” “No Effect,” “Beneficial,” “Very Beneficial” and “Not Applicable or Unsure,” with corresponding numerical values of 1 through 5, excepting “Not Applicable or Unsure.” The categories within the questions are meant to reflect Title IX benefits, organizational benefits and intangible social benefits. The categories include: Facilities, equipment, alumni relations, recruiting, publicity, team camaraderie, team leadership, coaching, win-loss record, and injury treatment.

The next section of questions are designed to address the fifth research question and utilize multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank formats. The first half of the questions are competitively oriented, asking information about practices, matches and fitness activities. The second half of the questions are socially oriented and ask about post-match socials and team bonding activities outside of practices.

Questions were assessed individually, as well as coded for broader application to the results.

The final section of questions attempts to show if the subject’s interest level has changed over the course of the survey, given new information. If the subject had not been aware prior to the survey, they might have provided a false negative in terms of their interest level.

III. Sample

The target population for this study included women's rugby club presidents and team captains at collegiate institutions during the 2013-2014 academic year. Surveys were sent to executive members and captains at institutions listed on the USA Rugby College Rugby page in Division I, Division II and NSCRO in addition to contacts provided from the USA Rugby administrator. Due to the varying nature of club structures, executive board make-up varies among institutions. It is assumed that executives and captains have at least one year of rugby experience, have a vested interest in the sport of rugby, and have a working knowledge of their individual team operations. Some teams only had email addresses listed for coaches and some team leaders also serve as coaches. Participants were asked to identify what role they held within the women's rugby program at their respective institution so that coach input could be identified and taken into account for analysis.

IV. Survey Distribution & Collection Procedures

After all of the subject's email addresses were collected, a letter that explained the purpose of the survey with a survey link, was sent to all subjects. The survey was distributed to 406 email addresses of team executive members, captains and coaches of 389 institutions. The name of their institution was identified as external data in Qualtrics. The respondents were assured that their responses would only be reported as aggregate results and only used for the purposes of this study. Three days after the initial distribution, a reminder email was sent to increase the response rate. Two days before closing the survey a final reminder email was sent.

V. Data Analysis

Initial data analysis was taken from the Qualtrics survey software reports of the data. To conduct further analysis, the data was entered into the statistical program of SPSS for Windows

version 21.0. Information received from respondents was analyzed to answer each of the four research questions posed for this study.

As this is a prospective study, analysis consists mainly of descriptive statistics and assessing the frequencies of particular answer choices. Questions pertaining to interest and awareness, both at the outset and at the end of the survey will provide direct insight and answers to the first two research questions. The results of these questions were presented in terms of frequency and percentage of respondents. A chi square test was utilized to test for significant differences among teams' USA Rugby division classifications and their initial and final levels of interest.

Open-ended responses were aggregated and coded for key terms. The frequencies of each key term's appearance were reported. For the Likert-style questions, the frequencies of responses, the means, and the standard deviations are reported.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Of the 406 emails sent to survey subjects via the Qualtrics mailer, sixteen were returned as undeliverable. Of the 370 opened emails, 207 responses covering 197 colleges and universities were recorded, with 185 respondents completing the entire survey. The N = 185 respondents represent an overall response rate of 50%. The demographic information for the survey can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographics

	n	(%)
USA Rugby Division		
Division I	51	20%
Division II	76	44%
NSCRO	46	22%
Unsure or Other	27	14%
NCAA Division		
Division I	62	30%
Division II	32	16%
Division III	56	27%
Unsure or not NCAA	56	27%
Role within Team¹		
President	96	46%
Captain	69	33%
Executive Member	46	22%
Coach	50	24%
Other	15	7%
Team Categorized at Institution		
Varsity Sport	1	0%
Club Sport	197	95%
Student Organization	5	2%
Other	4	2%

Note¹. Respondents were able to select multiple responses for this question.

Note². Respondents were asked how many years their team has existed on their campus, with a reported mean of 17.5 years and a standard deviation of 11.0 years.

Research Question 1: Are existing women's collegiate rugby teams interested in becoming an NCAA varsity sport?

To address the first research question, survey respondents were directly asked in the survey if they had interest in becoming an NCAA varsity sport, with the options of 'Yes,' 'No,'

or 'Unsure.' A majority of respondents answered 'Yes' (70%, $n = 141$), while 18% marked 'Unsure' ($n = 36$). Of the 202 respondents who answered this question, 12% ($n = 25$) had no interest in pursuing varsity status. At the end of the survey, respondents ($n = 185$) were again asked to rate their interest in pursuing varsity status, to see if respondents responded differently after the reflection involved in completing the survey. At the end of the survey, 46% ($n = 85$) of respondents indicated that they are 'Very Interested' in having women's rugby as a varsity sport at their institution, while 37% indicated that they were 'Slightly Interested' ($n = 68$). Seven percent of respondents ($n = 13$) indicated that they were not interested. The remaining 10% of respondents ($n = 19$) marked 'Unsure.' The data has a left skew, with the mean reflecting that more teams were interested than uninterested ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.895$).

Research Question 2: Are existing women's collegiate rugby teams aware of the application process to become a university-sponsored NCAA sport?

The respondents were asked a series of yes-no questions about their awareness of the status of rugby as an NCAA designated emerging sport, whether they had visited the USA Rugby website, and whether their club rugby program had ever applied for varsity status at their institution. Respondents were also asked a Likert scale question to indicate their level of awareness about the process for becoming a varsity sport at their institution. The answer choices for the question were weighted as 1 = 'Not Interested,' 2 = 'Unsure,' 3 = 'Slightly Interested' and 4 = 'Very Interested.' Finally, a question was asked about their knowledge of USA Rugby resources for those looking to take the next step toward varsity status. The responses to those questions are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Are women's club teams aware of the application process to become an NCAA varsity sport?

		n	%
Emerging Sport Status			
	Yes	90	45%
	No	110	55%
USA Rugby Website			
	Yes	184	99%
	No	1	1%
Applied for Varsity			
	Yes	27	14%
	No	110	55%
	Unsure	63	32%
Awareness of Process*			
	Know nothing about	97	49%
	Know a little bit	64	32%
	Know a moderate amount	28	14%
	Know very well	9	5%
Aware of USA Rugby Resources			
	Yes	43	23%
	No	142	77%

Note. The reported mean of Awareness of Process was (n = 199) was 1.73, with a standard deviation of 0.873.

Research Question 3: What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning?

In order to illuminate some of the reasoning behind their level of interest, respondents were asked directly for the reasoning behind their answer choice for initial interest. The open-responses were grouped into the categories of 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'Unsure.' Each set of responses was then further coded to determine whether certain reasons were more prevalent than others. The frequencies of the coded responses are listed in Table 3. Within the 'Yes,' subset the most common answer was 'Recognition and Support.' For teams not interested in varsity status, the most common response was that they focused more on a fun, relaxed, or more social dynamic. For those who were unsure, teams stated a desire for higher funding and facilities, but were hesitant to dedicate the amount of time and commitment that a varsity sport would require.

Table 3

What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning?

	n	%
Please Explain Your Reasoning for your Level of Interest*		
<i>Yes (68.3%)</i>		
Recognition and Support	58	51%
Funding	48	42%
Competitiveness	43	38%
Recruiting/Retention	34	30%
Growing the Sport	29	25%
Facilities	17	15%
Access to Athletic Trainers	14	12%
Coaching	11	10%
Scholarships	9	8%
Administration	7	6%
Academics	4	4%
Women in Sport	3	3%
<i>No (13.8%)</i>		
Fun, Social or Camaraderie Aspect	10	43%
Regulations	8	35%
Lack of Interest	5	22%
Time Dedicated or Commitment	3	13%
Recruiting	2	9%
Leadership	1	4%
No Coach	1	4%
Happy with Current Status	1	4%
<i>Unsure (18.0%)</i>		
Facilities and Resources (+)	11	37%
Commitment (-)	10	33%
Funding (+)	6	20%
Diminished Social Aspects (-)	6	20%
Recruiting (-)	6	20%
Autonomy/Leadership (-)	5	17%
Regulations (-)	4	13%
Academics (+)	3	10%
Unlikely at institution (-)	2	7%
Administration (+)	1	3%
Happy with Current Status (-)	1	3%

Note. Respondents may have mentioned more than one of the factors listed. The ‘Unsure’ respondents provided reasoning both for and against wanting varsity status. Answers that were pro-varsity are marked with the ‘+’ and answers against varsity status are marked with a ‘-’.

Respondents were asked in a Likert scale questions how each of the elements listed in

Table 5 would be impacted by NCAA sanctioning. Answer choices were 1 = ‘Very Detrimental,’

2 = ‘Detrimental,’ 3 = ‘Neither Detrimental nor Beneficial,’ 4 = ‘Beneficial’ and 5 = ‘Very Beneficial.’ Results are reported as the means and standard deviations of their responses in Table 4. The element with the highest mean was Pre-College Recruiting and the element with the lowest mean was Team Traditions.

Table 4
What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning?

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived NCAA Impact*			
Pre-College Recruiting	192	4.51	0.94
Access to Facilities	194	4.48	0.98
Injury Treatment	193	4.48	0.98
Quality of Equipment	195	4.42	0.94
Match Publicity	193	4.37	0.94
Perceptions of Women’s Rugby on Campus	191	4.30	0.97
Quality of Facilities	195	4.29	0.99
Quality of Practices	191	4.25	0.97
Match Scheduling	189	4.22	1.06
Player Retention	176	4.22	1.06
On-Campus Recruiting	193	4.20	1.14
Coaching	190	4.14	1.03
Win-Loss Record	185	3.92	0.99
Alumni Relations	189	3.85	1.02
Team Leadership	189	3.72	1.13
Team Dynamics	183	3.58	1.12
Team Camaraderie	185	3.48	1.05
Team Traditions	188	3.03	1.20

Note. The scale ranged from (1) Very Detrimental to (5) Very Beneficial. A sixth choice of ‘Unsure or Not Applicable’ was offered to avoid skewing the results. The ‘Unsure/Not Applicable’ responses were not factored into the mean and standard deviations.

Research Question 4: What goals and values do women’s collegiate rugby teams prioritize?

In addition to asking teams how they believed NCAA status would impact their team, additional questions were asked to paint a better picture of how teams operate and what aspects of rugby they most highly value. On average teams held about three practices per week ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.07$), for almost two hours per practice ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.28$). Eighty-four percent of the teams reported that they have some kind of additional sessions outside of practice,

including cardio/sprint work (n = 118, 63%), weight lifting (n = 117, 63%) and skills sessions (n = 61, 33%). Some other activities reported in open responses included yoga sessions, watching game film, strategy sessions, and team library hours.

The same elements from the NCAA Impact Likert-style question were carried forward to a second survey item asking respondents to rank each element on a scale where 1 = ‘Not Important’ and 5 = ‘Very Important.’ The means and standard deviations were reported, with ‘Team Camaraderie’ having the highest mean (M = 4.87, SD = 0.37) and ‘Pre-College Recruiting’ having the lowest mean (M = 3.75, SD = 1.16). The full listing of results can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

What goals and values do women’s collegiate rugby teams prioritize?

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Importance*			
Team Camaraderie	189	4.87	0.37
Team Dynamics	189	4.85	0.38
On-Campus Recruiting	188	4.78	0.44
Team Leadership	188	4.77	0.48
Player Retention	185	4.76	0.49
Injury Treatment	188	4.71	0.53
Team Traditions	188	4.68	0.59
Coaching	186	4.68	0.55
Access to Facilities	189	4.67	0.51
Quality of Practices	187	4.66	0.56
Quality of Equipment	189	4.39	0.69
Quality of Facilities	188	4.30	0.75
Perceptions of Women’s Rugby on Campus	188	4.30	0.92
Match Scheduling	186	4.24	0.73
Alumni Relations	185	4.23	0.82
Win-Loss Record	188	4.02	0.96
Match Publicity	189	3.99	0.89
Pre-College Recruiting	173	3.75	1.16

Note. The scale ranged from (1) Very Unimportant to (5) Very Important. A sixth choice of ‘Unsure or Not Applicable’ was offered to avoid skewing the results. The ‘Unsure/Not Applicable’ responses were not factored into the mean and standard deviations.

Utilizing open-ended questions, respondents were asked to list their favorite aspect of rugby. Their responses were coded to identify patterns. By a significant margin, “Team/Familial Camaraderie” was the most popular response (n = 99, 54%) with “Physicality” ranking second (n = 43, 24%). A full listing of top-coded responses are listed in Table 6.

Lastly, teams were asked to identify one aspect of their rugby program that they would like to change. While a few teams felt completely satisfied with their current operations (n = 3, 2%), the other 174 respondents reported a variety of desired changes. The highest reported response was an increase in funding (n = 46, 26%), closely followed by better facilities (n = 45, 25%) and increased recognition and support (n = 43, 24%), either from their institution or for the sport in general. A full listing of top-coded responses are also listed in Table 6.

Table 6
What goals and values do teams prioritize?

	n	(%)
Favorite Aspects (n = 182)*		
Team/Familial Camaraderie	99	54%
Physicality	43	24%
External and International Community	36	20%
General Gameplay	23	13%
Teamwork	19	10%
Specific Gameplay Aspects	18	10%
Team Traditions/Culture	18	10%
Welcoming to all players	12	7%
Women in Sport	5	3%
Life Lessons	4	2%
Most Desired Changes (n = 177)*		
Funding	46	26%
Better Facilities	45	25%
Recognition	43	24%
Recruiting and Retention	31	18%
Commitment/Attendance	23	13%
Athletic Trainer Access	19	11%
Equipment	14	8%
Coaching	14	8%
Varsity Status	13	7%
Organization/Administration	9	5%

Trouble-Making Image	7	4%
Happy with Current Program	3	2%
Stereotype of Homosexuality	1	1%

Note. Answers correspond to coded responses from open ended questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study is the first to explore rugby from an administrative standpoint. Past studies of women's rugby have had a heavy focus on the identity of women who play rugby in terms of masculinity or homosexuality, but few look at the organization and administration of the sport at the collegiate level logistically. The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of collegiate women's rugby to inform the best possible plan for the future.

Survey Overview

Although this survey attempted to reach out to the entire population of women's collegiate rugby leaders, in the process of developing contact lists it became clear that the entirety of this population is not known. While the USA Rugby website lists teams according to three divisions (DI, DII and NSCRO), some of the teams listed had defunct websites or lacked current contact information. Additionally, some of the team contacts that were acquired from an USA Rugby administrator were not teams that appeared on the website. It is hard to determine if this was because the programs were very new and had not yet been added to the website or if this was due to a lack of communication between teams and USA Rugby administration. Because a complete listing of institutions with women's rugby does not exist, the study was not able to reach the entire population.

Compounding the problem of incomplete information is that 14% of respondents were either not aware of what division they were classified into or fit into a different division than listed on the USA Rugby collegiate page. It is possible that new divisions have been formed and are not yet acknowledged on the website, but it would have been helpful to have separated out those respondents from those who selected 'Unsure.' When calculating the chi square for respondent's interest with respect to their USAR division, this 14% of responses were excluded.

An additional complicating factor in pinpointing the survey population came from club leaders that filled multiple roles. Some players serve as the president, captain and coach of their team. In the efforts to contact teams, emails were sent to coaches to be forwarded to player leaders, but within the data it is difficult to tell if a coach took the survey or if a player who is also a coach took the survey. Some of the respondents expressed frustration in the open-ended responses at having to take so much responsibility for their team by needing to perform so many functions. Having such a narrow power structure can lead to further complications that may not be explicitly stated in the results.

Research Question 1: Are existing women's collegiate rugby teams interested in becoming an NCAA varsity sport?

Broadly, the answer to RQ1 is yes. In both the initial and final interest inquiries, well over forty respondents (the minimum number of institutions required for NCAA sanctioning) expressed interest in pursuing varsity status. While this data validates the research topic, there are many factors that may undermine these responses. Aggregately, respondents skewed toward identifying as more competitive teams as opposed to social teams, but this could be the result of response bias. Competitive teams may be more likely to have an up-to-date and responsive communication structure, thereby making it more likely that their contact information was readily available and they were sent a survey. Upon receiving the survey, a competitive player may also be more likely to invest the time to actually complete the survey. Due to the voluntary nature of the survey, it is impossible to tell respondents' motivations for answering or choosing to not answer the survey.

In the open response questions, it was clear that some respondents had no interest in being a varsity athlete at all, regardless of NCAA involvement. This could be said for club athletes of any sport; they enjoy the game, but they don't have the time or willingness to dedicate

themselves to a varsity regimen. Based on these survey responses, there is sufficient data to understand teams' perceptions of how varsity status would affect them, but this survey wasn't able to as clearly explicate the difference between 'varsity status' and 'NCAA varsity status.'

A final limitation is that the respondents' answers do not necessarily reflect the opinions or desires of their team as a whole. In some cases, the respondents wanted their teammates to have higher levels of commitment or attendance, showing a dissonance that may undermine interest as polled in this survey.

Research Question 2: Are existing collegiate women's rugby teams aware of the application process to become a university-sponsored NCAA sport?

Compared to the responses for interest, there were significantly lower numbers for awareness. While 45% of respondents were aware that rugby was classified as an NCAA Emerging Sport, 49% "knew nothing" about the application process to be a varsity sport at their institution, while an additional 32% only "knew a little bit." Only 23% of the respondents knew that USAR offered resources specifically designed to apply for varsity status. Even though awareness regarding Emerging Sports was higher than expected, that may not be as relevant in terms of elevating a club team to varsity status. The burden of elevation is almost exclusively on the club teams; institutions will generally not seek out club teams that may be interested in varsity status. Having knowledge about the varsity application process is perhaps more important than just being aware of NCAA Emerging Sports. Reading through the open-ended responses, it appeared as though teams overall do not receive a significant amount of administrative support from their institution. If teams do not seek out this information on their own, there cannot be any progress made.

Using the SPSS software, respondents who appeared to be in a strong position to reach for varsity status were isolated. Termed "Ignition Teams" these respondents indicated that they

are aware that rugby is classified as an Emerging Sport, they are aware of the resources provided on the USA Rugby website, they claimed to know the varsity application process “moderately well” or “very well” and they expressed interest in being a varsity sport, either initially (n = 16) or at the end of the survey (n = 12). Although these teams seem to be poised to pursue varsity status, something is holding them back. Metaphorically these teams have the keys in the ignition, but there is another factor that apparently prevents them from turning the key. Potential explanations for this are explored through research questions three and four, and in relation to areas for future study.

Research Question 3 and 4: What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of NCAA sanctioning? *and* What goals and values do women’s collegiate rugby teams prioritize?

Research Questions 3 and 4 are both designed to gain a more in-depth understanding of the respondents’ levels of interest. While standing alone each set of questions provides a certain level of insight; the relationship between the two creates a more interesting picture.

For example, there are strong similarities between what respondents perceive as NCAA benefits and what aspect of their team that they would want to change. A few simply stated that their one change would be to obtain varsity status. The top four elements that respondents saw as being most beneficially impacted by NCAA status based on the mean of responses were pre-college recruiting, injury treatment, access to facilities, and quality of equipment. The top four most desired changes by frequency of response were funding, facilities, recognition and recruiting/retention. While there are direct overlaps with facilities and retention, most of these elements are more tangible in nature and directly relate to running a competitive sports team. When teams expressed a desire for increased ‘recognition,’ often times they simply wanted to be seen as a legitimate, hard-working team by their institution. While this is not a tangible element, teams wanted to bring rugby out of obscurity and erase its negative social stigmas in the eyes of

their administrators, which in turn would aid in building a more competitive and organized program.

Conversely, when teams were asked what elements they found to be most important, the top four most popular answers by mean were team camaraderie, team dynamics, on-campus recruiting and team leadership. Overall, these responses focused on the women playing on the team and less on the program itself. When asked their favorite aspect of rugby, the highest reported answer ($n = 99$) was the team camaraderie and familial nature of their team. The second highest response was the physicality of the game with only 43 responses. The data very clearly presents that teams place a high value on their players and having strong bonds within the team.

In some ways, these responses align well with data found in the literature review. Shockley also found that teams highly valued camaraderie, but her respondents had a higher focus on post-game socials with opposing teams (Shockley, 2005, p. 156). Within this data set, 28 respondents ($n = 187$) directly addressed social events with opponents or rugby “culture.” However, a much higher number of respondents ($n = 98$) addressed intra-team bonding or feeling as though they were part of a family. In some cases, the respondents would refer to both or may have mentioned “team traditions,” which were treated as a separate category from “rugby culture” and not included in the set of 28 mentioned above.

A second interesting similarity was the frequency of respondents who want to share their rugby experiences with as many people as possible. As mentioned in the literature review, Shockley’s respondents would be driven to “educate” non-ruggers when faced with questions or even judgment. In this study, there was a surprisingly high number of respondents who expressed a desire to “grow the sport,” not just within their institution, but across the country. A full 25% of respondents who expressed interest in elevating their team to varsity status cited “growing the

sport” as a part of their rationale. Being a relatively obscure sport, this desire to share knowledge could stem from passion for the game or from a deeper sense of empowerment as an athlete.

In one final striking comparison, respondents did express a very strong interest in being recognized by their institution as a legitimate sport in conjunction with breaking rugby stereotypes. Some specifically mentioned that their bad reputation stemmed from their men’s rugby program at their institution, but knowing that teams have an interest in shaking the image of the ‘beer-guzzling rugger,’ helps to reinforce the idea that teams want to be recognized as legitimate athletic clubs. While few expressed these stereotypes in terms of femininity or masculinity as Shockley’s respondents did, there seems to be an unacknowledged drive to compete at a higher level in a majority of women’s collegiate programs.

Looking back to the NCAA impact question, the items that teams saw as being least benefitted by NCAA status were team traditions, team camaraderie, team dynamics and team leadership. This dissonance between what teams value and their perceptions of how NCAA status will affect their team could explain some of the general sluggishness of conversion. On the other hand, it is possible that teams don’t see varsity status and a strong team bond as being mutually exclusive and the reasoning can be attributed back to a lack of knowledge regarding the varsity application process or an inability to meet the application requirements.

One element that is a paradigm example of the mixed interests is recruiting. While teams expressed a desire to have higher numbers on their roster and attending practice, many felt that adding a strong recruiting element would create an intimidating atmosphere and deter inexperienced players from coming out, including the respondents themselves. While there may be some misconceptions with how the recruiting process would be implemented, it makes sense given how highly respondents value a strong team dynamic that they may be wary of changing

the mechanisms that have brought their team together. Varsity status would remove a significant amount of the agency that club teams currently have and perceptions of recruiting seem to be at the crux of the issue. As a team leader, it may be unnerving to think about which of their teammates might not have found rugby if a more regimented recruiting process were in place. When envisioning the success of a varsity program, the image might be one with unfamiliar faces reaping the rewards.

Areas for Future Research

Looking at the data regarding interest and awareness, it is still not explicitly clear why more teams do not pursue varsity status. The area that will give the best insight into this gap would be the varsity application process and requirements. While an institution will not seek out teams to elevate to varsity status, an independent researcher could reach out to teams to assess how well they meet the requirements of their institution's application process. This would require familiarity with each institution's process and having a knowledgeable contact with each team that would be able to find historical data on their team's operations, competition record and budgeting. Given the under-developed communication infrastructure within USA Rugby, this study may be logistically challenging, but would help to identify areas in which teams are lacking.

Another interesting point may be to compare the success of Life University, an institution implementing a varsity program in the fall of 2014 that has no history of a club program, with an institution that has gone through the process of elevating a club team. Based on some of the respondents' answers to the open response questions, they feel that their program is too far off track to consider a varsity program and in order to get to that point, they would have to start from

scratch. Even a case study of Life University over its inaugural five years may cast the results of this study into a different light.

Overall, there is expressed interest from teams in regards to making the move to varsity status, but we are still lacking some of the reasoning behind the slow shift, which could be a result of lacking resources, low awareness of the application processes or as a result of the potential tension between team values and perceived NCAA benefits.

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